

VZCZCXRO8871
PP RUEHCI RUEHCN
DE RUEHKT #0828/01 2471317
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 041317Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0721
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 7104
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 7423
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2754
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 5465
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 6588
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3204
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 4737
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU PRIORITY 0483
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2403
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 3643
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000828

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: RETIRING COAS KATAWAL PESSIMISTIC ON FUTURE

REF: A. KATHMANDU 697

[1](#)B. KATHMANDU 364

Classified By: Charge d' Affaires, a.i., Jeffrey A. Moon. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Expressing appreciation for U.S. support over the years, Chief of Army Staff Katawal told Charge he remains deeply distrustful of Maoist intentions, stressing the importance of continued pressure on the Maoists. A strong and apolitical military is essential to protect Nepal's democracy. Katawal claimed he has no interest in becoming a Nepali politician following his September 9 retirement. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Rookmangud Katawal paid a courtesy call on CDA September 4 following visa interviews for him and his daughter. A divisive and controversial figure in Nepali politics, Katawal retires from his position September 9, to be replaced by Lt. General Chhatraman Gurung (ref A).

Appreciation for U.S. Support

[1](#)3. (C) Katawal expressed his appreciation for the USG support over the years. U.S. assistance, including training on human rights and international humanitarian law, was very helpful to the Nepal Army. Katawal particularly valued the training and assistance to the Nepal Army Special Forces units, which are among the most effective units in the NA.

Nepal Army Forced Maoists to Negotiating Table

[1](#)4. (C) Reflecting on his three-year tenure as COAS, Katawal noted that he sometimes played a role that an Army Chief of Staff in "normal times" would not have. Katawal claimed he had no alternative since no one else was willing or able to serve as "guardian of the army as an institution." Expressing "pride" in the role the army played in stopping the Maoist insurgency, Katawal stressed that the Nepal Army never attempted to destroy the Maoists, but rather to pressure them to negotiate.

[1](#)5. (C) The Army's support for abolishing the monarchy was "particularly painful" for Katawal, given his personal connections to the royal family. However, the King would not listen to his pleas to create a constitutional monarchy, so

the Army had to respect the wishes of the Nepali people.

Maoist Agenda -- Eviscerate Army

¶16. (C) Katawal claimed that the Maoist attempts to force the retirement of Nepali army soldiers and police with thirty years of service would have decimated the institution. This effort, as well as attempts to fire him (ref B) and force the retirement of other generals, were part of a broader Maoist plan to take over the state security institutions. The Maoists regard the Nepal Army as the major stumbling block to their efforts to seize power.

¶17. (C) During his tenure, Katawal met with Maoist leader and former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal (aka Prachanda) some 42 times, but was not able to convince him to keep his hands off the military. Prachanda is "cunning" and able to hold his party together, despite the fact that the "hard-liners" currently control the party. In Katawal's view, domestic and international forces must maintain pressure on the Maoists or else they will not compromise.

Army as "Bedrock" of Democracy

¶18. (C) Looking to the future, Katawal was generally pessimistic. "Non-state actors (read: Maoists) are stronger than state actors," presenting major challenges for the country. While the Maoists are very clear about their agenda and strategy, other political parties lack a clear action plan. Katawal expressed particular concern about proposals

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for federalism, which he feared could lead to secessionist tendencies in the southern Terai region. If that should happen, the Nepal Army must be prepared to protect the integrity of the Nepali state.

¶19. (C) Katawal reiterated that the Nepal Army wants to remain apolitical, ready to protect the Nepali people and state. Military training and proper equipment is critical to the Army's readiness and capacity. In his view, the integration and rehabilitation process should be done within the contours of the law and peace agreements. He cited the refusal of the Maoists to release the approximately 4,000 disqualified fighters from cantonments as evidence of their bad faith.

Katawal Claims No Politics in His Future

¶10. (C) After his official retirement September 9, Katawal plans to travel to the United States and Canada and "relax." The financially well-off Katawal said he has no interest in becoming a Nepali politician, claiming that he lacks the two prerequisites: money and the ability to lie. Katawal said he may write articles in Nepali newspapers, noting that he has done so in the past under pseudonyms.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: While a capable and intelligent general, Katawal's quiet retirement, on schedule, is good news for the Nepali peace process. Most observers view Katawal as arrogant and divisive, especially following former PM Prachanda's attempt to fire him in May. His replacement, General Gurung, is a more low-key, apolitical figure, who listens to others and may be better able to make the necessary compromises on army integration and other key security issues. END COMMENT.

MOON